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Democrats Denounce Reagan for Faulty Intelligence in Att

Aides Dispute CIA's 'Near-Destruction'

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Past and present CIA officials yesterday sharply disputed President Reagan's campaign claim on Wednesday that there was a "near-destruction of our intelligence capability" before he took office.

Aides to Reagan's CIA director, William J. Casey, said neither budget nor personnel levels were cut unduly during President Jimmy Carter's administration.

Cuts in the covert operations branch under Carter's CIA director, Adm. Stansfield Turner, briefly became an issue when agency old-timers and some others fought them. But officials said yesterday that the cuts were almost exclusively of headquarters bureaucrats and that none involved an operative or agent overseas.

A general decision to make some cuts in CIA personnel was made after the Vietnam war in 1976 and early 1977 when George Bush, Reagan's vice president, was CIA director, these officials said. This decision was executed and accelerated during the Carter administration.

But officials also said that Reagan had seen improvement over his 3½ years in office in the intelligence he receives, largely because of improvement in satellites and other

intelligence technology. In addition, one official said that morale has improved in the intelligence community under Reagan and efforts have been made to expand the so-called human intelligence or information obtained from spies.

"What he sees as president and knows about what is going on," this official said, "just makes him feel what we're doing now is much better."

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) said yesterday that this does not justify Reagan's statements because those technical improvements were set in motion in previous administrations, especially during the Carter years.

Moynihan, who is vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and several other intelligence experts yesterday questioned whether there have been improvements in intelligence gathered by humans. Senior Reagan administration officials still complain privately that that kind of intelligence is still not very good.

Noting that the president's comments about the purported intelligence failure were in response to a question about last week's terrorist bombing of the U.S. Em-

bassy annex in Beirut, Moynihan said, "Getting inside a terrorist group is the hardest thing this government can do. It can take years and years."

As further indication that the intelligence question is becoming a political issue, Moynihan and Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), chairman of the intelligence committee, yesterday introduced legislation that would require that future CIA directors and deputy directors be chosen from among career civilian or military intelligence personnel.

The legislation would prevent political appointments such as those of Bush and Casey, who was Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign chairman. Both Goldwater and Moynihan said their proposal would not apply to Casey, who has been told by Reagan that he is welcome to stay as CIA director if the president is reelected.

Goldwater said in an interview two weeks ago that even though he supports Casey and believes he is doing a good job, he does not feel that someone from the political ranks should fill the post in the future.

Last spring, Goldwater became upset with Casey when he felt that Casey was not keeping the Senate intelligence committee sufficiently informed about CIA support for the mining of some Nicaraguan harbors. In an April 9 letter, Goldwater told Casey, "It gets down to one, little, simple phrase: I am pissed off!"

Two weeks ago, Goldwater said Casey is "a goddamned lovable old bastard who is shrewd and has been fantastically successful" in rebuilding the agency. Goldwater said he blames the CIA's problems more on the congressional investigations of the agency in 1975-76 than on any other single factor, including the Carter administration.

Moynihan said in an interview yesterday that after eight years on the committee, he and Goldwater "feel there is no place for partisan politics in the intelligence community . . . and the legislation is our statement and judgment of the case."

On Reagan's comments about an alleged intelligence failure in the previous administration, one current intelligence official said, "It's really a bum rap that Turner did something that hurt the agency this way." CIA personnel figures during Turner's tenure show that 820 positions were eliminated from the operations branch over two years; 17 were fired, another 154 were asked to retire one or two years early, and 649 positions were lost because of attrition.

"This was exactly the kind of getting the bureaucrats to throw their briefcases in the Potomac that Ronald Reagan advocates," the official said. Several other officials said that the Vietnam war buildup had created a bloated bureaucracy at CIA headquarters and that agents and CIA personnel abroad were being overmanaged.

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